

Forum: Economic and Social Council

Topic: Addressing the political and economic causes and consequences of the decline of birth index in Europe

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Position: President

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## **Personal Introduction**

Dear delegates,

My name is Maira Antonopoulou, I am 17 years old and I am a student of the 12<sup>th</sup> Grade in Costeas-Geitonas School (CGS). This would be my sixth-time chairing, and the second one as a chair in the ECOSOC. I have to admit that it would be my utmost honor to serve as the president of the ECOSOC in the 3<sup>rd</sup> session of the Anavryta School Model United Nations. Overall, I have participated in 17 MUN conferences and from my experience, MUN is not just an academic conference, it is a whole society itself. The most important thing that MUN offers to younger people is the chance to get involved with realistic and crucial problems which our world is called to face on a daily basis. One of these topics concerns the political and economic causes and consequences of the decline of birth index in Europe. Cases like this, for which global action is essential, strike every day. The provision of those incidents and the confrontation of them, is essential for the greater good of our society.

Dear delegates, for any questions or concerns which may arise during the period of studying, for the study guide and general for the topic, feel free to contact me:

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## **Introduction to the topic**

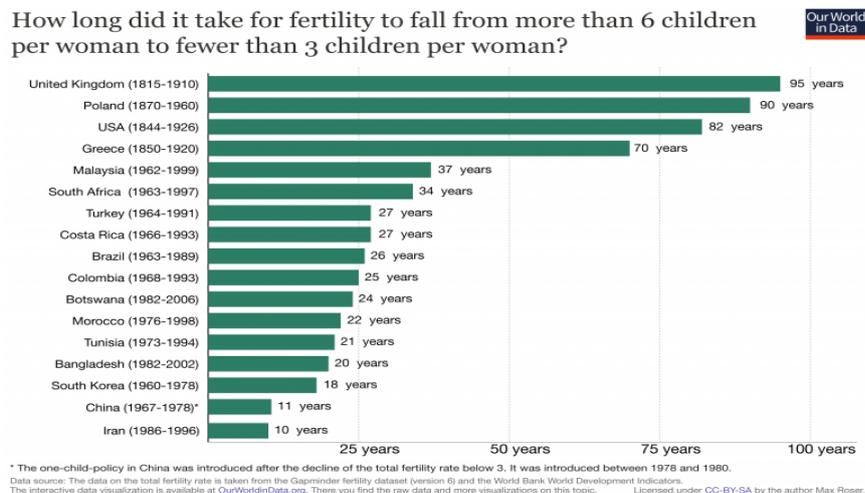
In our days, with the constant and goal-oriented development of the world, the infinite effort for reinforcing the steady basis of our community and the growth rates in all political, economic and social fields, changes the world every day.

Although, all these modifications may be, most of the time, extremely beneficial for the welfare of our species, it is possible to lead to some problems which are critical for each society and need to be faced drastically.

One prime example, is the aging or graying of Europe, as this phenomenon has been characterized, and concerns the low fertility, the decrease in the mortality rate and the higher life expectancy, as well as the decrease in the proportion of the working age, according to research which reveals that the number of retired people is increasing day by day.

This phenomenon leads to the consequent decline of the birth index in Europe, which is a problem that must be confronted immediately. This issue appears to have, based on specialists' and UN's publications, multiple consequences for everyone, as it affects the world's population directly, not only for the current generations but also for those who are yet to follow. Long-term, the result of this situation is that the future of the globe becomes highly unstable and uncertain.

According to a EUROPA (European Parliament) research, the birth rates in Europe started ceasing from 2010 until 2017, when a slight increase is observed. In 2017, there were 5.075 million babies born in Europe and almost half of them were firstborn. These statistics seem rather odd when taking into consideration that the average age that women give birth is among 29-32 years old, a number which has been increased in conjunction with previous decades, when the average age was between 18-23.



## Definition of Key-Terms

### Total Fertility Rate (TFR)

“The TFR is defined as the average number of children that would be born to a woman over her lifetime, if the woman were to experience the current age-specific fertility rates throughout her lifetime. It is a metric that captures the fertility rate in one particular year rather than over the life course of a generation of women – it is a period, not a cohort metric.”<sup>1</sup>

### Migration movement/migrant

“The UN Migration Agency (IOM) defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a state away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of the person’s legal status, whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary, what the causes for the movement are, or what the length of the stay is.”<sup>2</sup>

### Life expectancy

“Life expectancy at birth is the average number of years a new-born is expected to live, under the assumption that prevailing patterns of mortality stay the same throughout her or his life.”<sup>3</sup>

## **Background Information**

### Causes of the decrease of the augmentation of the population

#### ➤ Increasing life expectancy

In the last decades, there has been an increase in the life expectancy of the people in Europe, as in 2017, according to the EUROSTAT, it was estimated at 80.9 years. This phenomenon is a result of a variety of different factors including rising living standards, improved ways of living-lifestyles, relevant education, especially for the

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<sup>1</sup> Roser, Max. “Fertility Rate.” *Our World in Data*, 19 Feb. 2014, [ourworldindata.org/fertility-rate](http://ourworldindata.org/fertility-rate)

<sup>2</sup> “Migration.” *United Nations*, United Nations, [www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/migration/index.html](http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/migration/index.html)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.who.int/whosis/whostat2006DefinitionsAndMetadata.pdf>

women, and reduction in infant mortality. Also, the health care institutes and contemporary medicine have improved.

In general, the life expectancy reflects the overall fertility level of a population, according to the Global Health Observatory (GHO). Women seem to be living longer than men and the gap between those two is approximately 4.3 years.

➤ Low fertility rates

The fertility rates in Europe seem to be low since 1960 with a rising decade from 2000-2010, when the development starts sizing again until 2013, followed by a rising in 2017. Generally, by 2100 it is estimated there will be 13% fewer people living in countries of the EU, in conjunction with the nowadays data.

The main factors that affect this phenomenon are:

- Religious beliefs
- Economic prosperity of each family
- Social structure
- Urbanization within a country
- Abortion rates
- Higher education in women and thus professional future that causes them to give birth late in life

➤ International Migration

It is very common that a lot of migrants, mostly from Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), move to Europe. From 1960 until 2018, according to EUROSTAT, the total population rate of the EU increased by 106 million. Most of the migrants arrived in Europe with the aim to study abroad, join family members or pursue a better professional life. The majority of them were not interested in building a family or at least this was not their primary goal.

Social Factors

In comparison to previous decades, when they were less educated and more devoted to their families and the raising of their children (patronymic system),

women have, nowadays, equal rights, provisions, freedom and opportunities as men. Thus, women, like men, in order to cope with the competitive labor environment, utilize most of their time to complete their university and post university studies. This is essential for them, to secure a better professional career and highly paid jobs, while compared to other candidates that do not have the same qualifications and possess fewer educational skills.

Family formation and raising of children has become a second priority, to be materialized mainly when women earn enough disposal income to be economically independent. It is, therefore, a common observation that men and women do not start thinking of the creation of their own family at a young age. This causes other kinds of problems of medical character, as the older a woman gets, the more difficult it is for her to give birth and usually, she limits herself to only one child.

#### Economic consequences

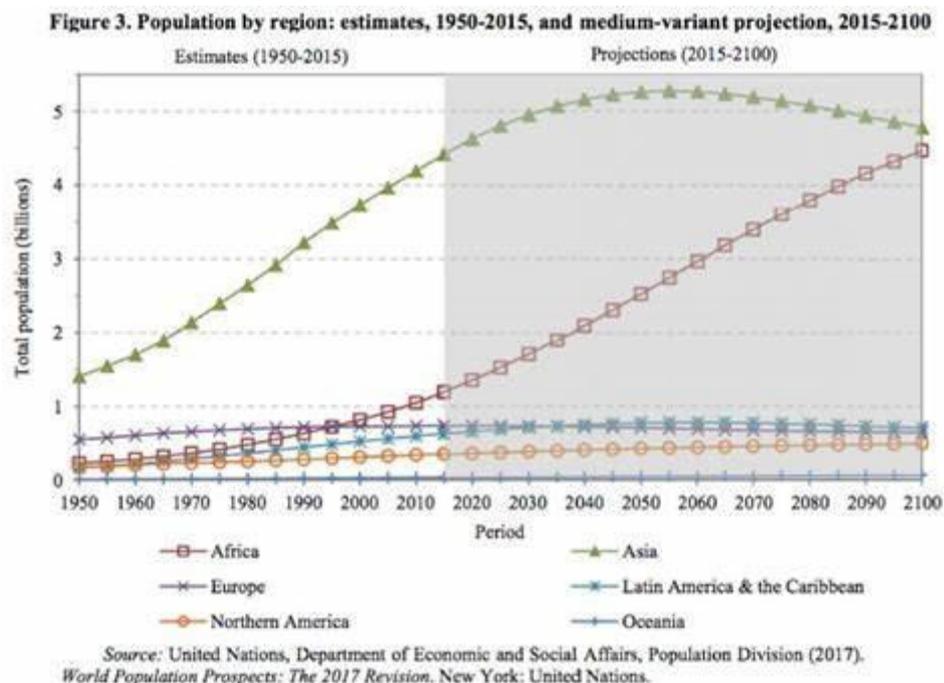
Due to low fertility the labor forces are constantly reduced. As a result of this, countries are no longer self-sufficient to cover their own needs and thus put in jeopardy all the existing systems pertaining to income taxes, social care and pension schemes. This means that, it is essential to recalculate, redraft and reintroduce measures which will secure funds for the maintenance of their existing systems and increase the income for new generations that are yet to come.

At a certain point low fertility is expected to lead to the amalgamation of people from other countries, in order to fulfill the states' labor needs. This labor force will include all kinds of professionals, from scientists to workers. It is also important to mention that this phenomenon of people osmosis will have as a consequence the deterioration of local culture, habits and tradition.

#### Chinese policy of one child

From the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century until recently, the Chinese government ratified this law in order to deal with the mass problem of overpopulation. It forced the Chinese citizens to only give birth to one child, otherwise they would be subjected to a number of punishments and penalties, based on their social status. The aim was to manage a

balance in the population and conform with the aging population (the age rates of a country are high, meaning that there is an augmented median age population, due to the reasons that have been mentioned above). Along with the practice of delayed marriage (the old age that a woman gets married and creates her family in our century), this policy prevented approximately 400 million births from 1980.



## Major Countries and Organizations involved

### Spain

A Spanish consultant, “Alejandro Macarrón”, when describing the demographic change of the country pointed out: “We have provinces in Spain where for every baby born, more than two people die. And the ratio is moving closer to one to three.”<sup>4</sup>

Spain is one of the countries in the European Union that has a huge problem with the low fertility rates. Based on research, the EU’s average birth percentage for every woman is 1.55 children, while Spain is below average with 1.27 children born

<sup>4</sup>Kassam, Ashifa, et al. “Europe Needs Many More Babies to Avert a Population Disaster.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 22 Aug. 2015, [www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/23/baby-crisis-europe-brink-depopulation-disaster](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/23/baby-crisis-europe-brink-depopulation-disaster)

for every woman. This phenomenon has led to mass migration of Spanish people in hope of finding a better future concerning the professional field. This net exodus, had as a consequence an economic crisis for the country, as since 2012 the population has been decreasing.

### Portugal

In Portugal the shrinking of the population is grave. The prime minister Pedro Passos Coelho, highlighted: "We've got really serious problems."<sup>5</sup> That is only logical when taking into consideration that the population is declining since 2010 and, according to the National Statistics Institute, by 2060 the Portuguese population could alter from 10.5 million people to 6.3, due to the low fertility rates.

### Germany

The situation in Germany also seems critical, as it appears to have the lowest birth rate percentages in the world, according to a study by the Hamburg World Economy institute (HWWI), with 8.2 births per 1000 population between the years 2008-2013.

### United Kingdom

The UK seems to be in the greatest position of all European countries. Based on a research of the Office for National Statistics, the population of the country reached 64.4 million people in 2014, meaning that there was a growth of 491.000 over the previous year. In general it appears that the population of the UK has been increasing faster in conjunction with the last 50 years, meaning that the country has a high birth rate.

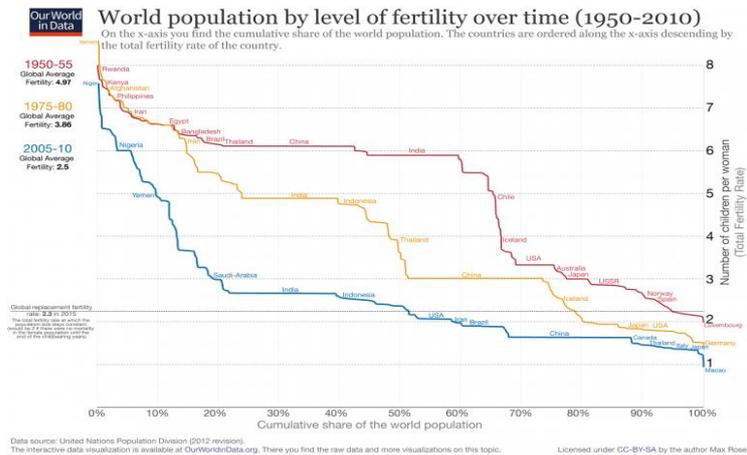
### Malta

Malta appeared to have the lowest fertility rates across the EU in 2017. According to Eurostat the average age of Maltese women giving birth is 30.5 years and the

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<sup>5</sup>Kassam, Ashifa, et al. "Europe Needs Many More Babies to Avert a Population Disaster." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 22 Aug. 2015, [www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/23/baby-crisis-europe-brink-depopulation-disaster](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/23/baby-crisis-europe-brink-depopulation-disaster)

average age of first childbirth is 29 years. Malta had a birth rate of 1.26 in 2017, when the average across all the EU countries at that time was 1.59.



### Timeline of events

Time	Description of Event
1960	The first slight decline in Europe’s population was observed.
1985	The population of Europe was identified with 10% of the world’s population, equal to the population rates of Africa.
2000	There was a slight augmentation of the birth index rates.
2010	There was a decrease in the continent’s fertility rates.
2013	The population’s percentages fell once again.
2017	There was an uplifting point in the European birth index, as 5.075 million babies were born.
2025	It is estimated that by 2025 the population of Europe will have been reduced by 6% and will be two thirds lower than the population of Africa, due to low fertility rates and stable death rate.

- This is a hyperlink of the Population Research Institute that describes thoroughly the situation and the demographic changes in Europe from the appearance of its decline of birth index until now:  
<https://www.pop.org/fertility-decline-in-western-europe/>

## Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

### The World Population Prospect 2019

Based on the prospects of the UN, during the next decade it is estimated that the world's population will reach around 8.5 billion and in 2050 almost 10 billion (compared to the 7.7 billion in 2019). While the population of some countries has increased and they have high fertility rates, others see their population constantly decreasing. This phenomenon has grave consequences in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN. This program aims to keep track of the demographic changes of all the UN member states from 1950 to the present.

Thus, the highlights of its prospects are:

- "Confirms that the world's population continues to grow, albeit at a slowing rate;
- Points to the challenges some countries and regions face related to rapid population growth driven by high fertility;
- Notes that population size is decreasing in some countries due to sustained low fertility or emigration;
- Underscores the opportunities available to countries where a recent decline in fertility is creating demographic conditions favorable for accelerated economic growth;
- Highlights the unprecedented ageing of the world's population;
- Confirms the ongoing global increase in longevity and the narrowing gap between rich and poor countries, while also pointing to significant disparities in survival that persist across countries and regions;
- Describes how international migration has become an important determinant of population growth and change in some parts of the world."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019\\_Highlights.pdf](https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf)

United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Policy Responses to Low Fertility

This meeting, held in New York in 2015, examined the trends in fertility, population aging and fertility policies. It aimed to develop the discussion of this phenomenon, by involving a number of other sectors such as stakeholders, policymakers, academics and selected UN agencies, as well as international institutes.

Furthermore, it presented a series of 18 papers, by experts from European, Asian and North

American countries, that provide guidance to the states that suffer from low fertility rates and aging of the population, as well as solutions in order to tackle the problem.

Immigration by country of birth, 2016

	Total immigrants		Native born		Total		Foreign-born		Born in another EU Member State		Born in a non-member country		Unknown	
	(thousands)	(%)	(thousands)	(%)	(thousands)	(%)	(thousands)	(%)	(thousands)	(%)	(thousands)	(%)	(thousands)	(%)
Belgium	123.7	15.4	12.4	107.6	80.9	62.1	42.1	65.5	44.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bulgaria	21.2	9.7	45.7	11.5	54.3	1.9	8.9	9.7	45.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Czech Republic	64.1	10.0	15.7	64.0	84.3	23.5	36.6	30.6	47.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Denmark	74.4	15.5	20.9	58.8	79.1	24.6	33.1	34.2	46.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Germany (*)	1 029.9	76.6	7.4	933.0	90.6	383.2	37.2	549.8	53.4	20.3	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Estonia	14.8	0.6	44.7	8.2	65.3	3.6	24.1	4.6	31.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Ireland	46.2	28.7	33.7	55.3	64.9	28.4	33.3	26.9	31.6	1.1	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Greece	116.9	26.9	22.9	90.0	77.1	19.3	16.5	70.7	60.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Spain	414.7	33.8	8.2	380.9	91.8	105.1	25.3	276.8	66.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
France	378.1	94.4	25.0	283.7	75.0	83.8	22.2	199.9	52.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Croatia	14.0	3.6	25.9	10.4	74.1	2.4	17.2	8.0	56.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Italy	300.8	29.1	9.7	271.7	90.3	55.3	18.4	216.4	71.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Cyprus	17.4	3.4	19.6	14.0	80.4	6.8	39.2	7.2	41.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Latvia	8.3	4.0	47.9	4.3	51.7	1.4	16.2	3.0	35.4	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Lithuania	20.2	11.6	67.3	8.6	42.7	1.6	7.7	7.1	35.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Luxembourg	22.9	1.3	5.8	21.4	83.6	14.0	61.1	7.4	32.5	0.1	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hungary	53.6	16.5	30.8	37.1	69.2	14.6	27.2	22.5	42.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Malta	17.1	1.6	9.6	15.4	90.4	8.3	48.7	7.1	41.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Netherlands	169.2	28.3	15.0	160.9	85.0	61.1	48.7	32.3	99.8	52.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Austria	129.5	7.8	6.0	119.1	92.0	60.6	46.8	68.5	45.2	2.6	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Poland (**)	208.3	121.5	58.3	82.8	39.8	30.9	14.8	51.9	24.9	4.0	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Portugal (*)	29.9	11.8	39.4	18.1	60.6	7.4	24.8	10.7	35.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Romania	137.5	90.1	65.5	45.9	33.4	9.9	7.2	36.1	26.2	1.5	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Slovenia	16.6	2.9	12.1	14.6	87.9	3.2	19.3	11.4	68.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Slovakia	7.7	1.1	14.3	6.6	85.7	5.2	67.0	1.4	18.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Finland	34.9	6.3	18.1	27.6	79.0	7.0	29.0	20.6	58.9	1.0	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sweden	163.0	15.3	9.4	147.5	90.5	29.6	18.1	117.9	72.3	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
United Kingdom	588.0	63.3	10.7	525.7	89.3	238.8	40.5	288.9	48.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Iceland	8.7	1.7	20.1	6.7	76.8	5.1	59.0	1.5	17.8	0.3	3.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Liechtenstein	0.6	0.0	6.3	0.6	93.7	0.2	37.9	0.3	55.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Norway	61.5	4.4	7.1	57.1	92.9	20.4	33.2	36.7	58.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Switzerland	149.3	17.5	11.7	131.1	87.8	78.3	62.5	62.7	35.3	0.8	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0

Note: The values for the different categories of country of birth may not sum to the total due to rounding.

(\*) Break in series.  
 (\*\*) Provisional.  
 (\*) Estimate.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: migr\_inm3ctb)



**Previous Attempts to solve the issue**

European Union

The European Union has suggested the following as measures to combat this problem of population disaster:

- “Immigration→ To the South and East of Europe lie considerably poorer countries with young and growing populations. The European Union, has published and adopted a policy concerning the immigrants that are moving in Europe every year, called “Policy Plan on Legal Migration”, in order to encourage those people to work and live within the European borders, and therefore create families and start rebuilding their life, a fact that will automatically raise the birth rates and create space for expert employees in the work area. The European Commission has already as an intention to adopt the United States’ “Blue Cards” system for immigrants, for supporting

those people. However, immigration is a growing issue in its own right. Also, the immigrants themselves will eventually age.

- Working longer and receiving your pension later → This means that each government will ratify and adopt a law system suggesting the age that someone can get retired from work will be higher than the usual standards or compared to other continents, to provide the citizens with a social background, in which they will be able to work longer . Thus, they will have more opportunities for their professional advancement and simultaneously have time to create their own families, contributing to the birth index augmentation percentage.
- New birth policies → Encouraging people to have more children providing them with a tax system with more liberations. This means that for families with more than 2 children the taxes that have to be paid will be reduced and compatible with their numerous economic and social duties, taking into consideration their social-economic status”<sup>7</sup>

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### Individual Efforts

To tackle this issue, there have been numerous efforts not only by organizations, but also individuals. Greek diplomat Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, who is a MEP (Member of the European Parliament), wrote a report addressing the issue at hand and proposing measures to combat it. This report (which has been adopted in June’s Plenary Session 2018 of the EU), focuses on empowering women and giving them essential opportunities for employment. The report pointed out the following:

- “Simple and easy loans on beneficial terms to young men and women who are combining family responsibilities with a period of study or training
- Housing that is situated to the needs of students who are also parents
- Access to childcare under the same criteria as working parents”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+IM-PRESS+20080414FCS26499+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN&language=EN>

<sup>8</sup><http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+IM-PRESS+20080414FCS26499+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN&language=EN>

## Possible Solutions

In order to tackle the critical issue of low fertility rates in Europe, we shall take into account all the possible solutions or acts that can be implemented.

### Measures on a governmental level:

- Allowances given by the governments in the families with more than one child.
- Special campaigns in order to change the culture of each society, informing new mothers of the provisions of the healthcare system.
- It is also important to create and operate more nursery schools, in order to provide new parents with the necessary means to continue their professional career.
- What is very critical is to create a fair taxation system which will foresee tax reductions for new parents who have more than one child.
- It would also be beneficial to promote an economic system for new parents, by providing a special fund for them to be able to take loans which will help in the daily care of their child/children.
- Reinforcement of the provision of professional services from logo-therapists, physiotherapists, etc. for those children who are in need of them during their early childhood.

### Individual measures

- Encouraging the creation of a special volunteering program, with the aid of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), in which experienced mothers will provide advice, opinions, expertise and knowledge to newer ones, helping them make their tasks easier.
- Creation of a 24-Hour Hotline with expert volunteer physiologists and doctors, that mothers can use to take advice and to be guided for any issues that may arise during the pregnancy period or after.
- Raising public awareness by advertisements and campaigns, organized by NGOs, informing the citizens for the high and active governmental support

towards the new parents, with the provision of benefits such as access to free childcare.

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